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STATE FOR AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL/AE AND INR/AA

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TAGS: KDEM KISL PGOV PHUM PINR PREL SOCI SG

SUBJECT: DANCERS GETS PROBATION FOR "OBSCENE DANCING"

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY CHARGE D, AFFAIRES JAY SMITH FOR REASONS 1.

4 (B) AND (D)

#### SUMMARY

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¶11. (C) A recent obscenity case against a well-known dancer, Ndeye Gueye, has pitted social conservatives, imams, and Islamists against secularist and lawyers who say that this kind of jurisprudence poses a danger to Senegal's traditions of social and religious tolerance. Gueye was charged, tried and released under probation for offending "good morals" after a video of her "dancing obscenely" in a nightclub was pirated and released on the Internet. While she and her colleagues were released, the organizer of the evening and a barman, both Spanish expatriates, were sentenced to one month in prison. According to opposition leaders and others, the case represents an effort by President Wade to court support from conservative leaders and to distract attention from the country's economic woes and charges of official corruption.

END SUMMARY.

#### Background

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¶12. (SBU) During a private party in a nightclub in 2005 a group of well-known local dancers called "Les Gazelles," led by Ndeye Gueye, took to the stage to individually dance to the music of traditional African drums. Unbeknownst to the girls, the event was recorded and in mid-2007 a DVD, called "Goudi Town, Yeumbeul Down" was being sold in the streets of Dakar and available on the Internet. While grainy it is clear from the footage that the girls' "dancing" involved the sexual contortions that one might expect in an R-rated Hip Hop music video. After the video's release three dancers, the evening's organizer and a barman were all charged with: "offending good morals, indecent behavior and complicity to engage in said activities." The prosecutor asked for prison time. The defense argued that this "leumbeul" style of dancing is the norm not the exception in Senegal, that the girls were unaware they were being filmed and thus had no intention of commercially exploiting the proceeds from the DVD and that they are being used as scapegoats by social conservatives who think that Senegal has become too Westernized.

#### The rise of Islamic Conservatism?

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¶13. (C) The case has become vehicle for conservative forces to promote their agenda, according to Amath Dansokho, the chairman of the Party for Independence and Labor(PIT). Many credit Dansokho's public intervention as the main reason why the dancers escaped jail time. Dansokho has long been arguing, sometimes dramatically, that there are shadowy groups who are waiting for the right opportunities to assail what they see as the rending of Senegal's moral fabric.

¶4. (SBU) One of the parties that associated itself with the prosecutor's case is such a group and calls itself the Association of Koranic Teachers. Up until now, this relatively obscure group has focused on trying to maintain Talibe (Koranic student) culture, including begging, and denounced Tostan (an international NGO that is fighting against begging by talibes), saying that it is undermining traditional Koranic teaching methods. The Association of Koranic Teachers, conservative imams, and former government minister cum lawyer Massokhane Kane all became parties to the case, collectively arguing that Senegal needs a new moral order and that society has become corrupt and far too permissive.

¶5. (C) Kane told PolOffs that this issue is less about the girls than about having a debate over the progressive erosion of Senegal's values and an increasing lack of respect for religious principles. He blamed the importation to Senegal of foreign attitudes and ideologies that have led to lifestyles that run counter to the country's traditional moral credo. In the end, the judge in the case decided that the aforementioned civil parties had no case and dismissed their petitions.

#### The Imams Speak up

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¶6. (SBU) In his Saturday October 12 sermon to celebrate the end of Ramadan, the influential Imam Ratib of Dakar's Grand Mosque, El Hadji Pape Moussa Samb, said that a censorship commission needed to be set up in order filter the content of local television stations: "the images that we see on television today do not conform to our traditions or our values." This comment, made to a flock that included the Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior, was a none-too-subtle reference to the numerous stills that local TV channels have been broadcasting of the Ndeye Gueye video.

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He continued by saying that Senegal cannot be allowed to be negatively influenced by the West and that its own set of values have served the country well. The Imam also believes that justice in this case was too lenient, a viewpoint that he shares with the outspoken and influential Imam of Thies, Tamsir Ndiour, who made similar comments in his Saturday sermon.

#### The Government Acquiesced to the Prosecution

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¶7. (C) For this case to have gotten this far it had to be approved by Justice Minister Sy, who oversees all of the country's prosecutors. Senegal is known as a tolerant country and this is the first time in recent memory that people are being prosecuted for doing something that is an essential part of Senegalese culture - dancing. Senegalese dancing is well respected throughout the world said Gadiaga Diop Done, cultural affairs reporter for the "Nouvelle Horizon" weekly. She went on to say that this kind of dancing has always existed in Senegal and that nobody has ever been offended nor has it ever come to the attention of prosecutors. She opined that this case represses Senegalese culture and sets a very dangerous precedent.

¶8. (C) Abdou Latif Gueye, Deputy Speaker at the National Assembly and staunch Wade supporter, told us that this case was a good thing as it sparked a national debate on issues of moral comportment and respect for values. He added that the girls should now be left alone as they have suffered enough as sacrificial lambs. He then averred that far worse things were going on in Dakar and suggested that some of the people who actually condemned Ndeye Gueye were themselves guilty of hypocrisy.

¶9. (C) If he had wanted to, Minister Sy and, by extension President Wade, could have easily stopped the case from going forward. However, PIT chairman Dansokho believes that this is a cheap bone thrown by Wade to the Islamists. In this

way, he strengthens his support from the country's more conservative elements without having to spend any political capital. An added bonus is that the papers, blogs, and magazines have been riveted by this story for months thus diverting the people's attention away from the current economic crisis. According to Serigne Mbaye Thiam, a leader of the opposition Socialist Party (PS), the government actively encouraged journalists to cover the Ndeye Gueye story instead of the controversial Sudatel mobile phone contract that many allege was opaque and corruptly awarded.

Comment

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¶10. (C) While most commentators dismiss the claim that this case was an effort on the part of the government to "clean up" Dakar ahead of the OIC summit in March 2008, as the OIC Summit approaches, the GOS will likely do whatever it can to positively showcase the country - especially given that the main sponsors of Dakar's facelift are conservative Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

¶11. (C) Nevertheless, even as there is no doubt this case has been blown out of proportion, it does open a series of questions about the underlying motive of those parties involved and the direction Senegal might be heading in. While many of the civil parties who joined the case did so to promote their own conservative agendas, there are clearly leaders in the country, especially in the religious community, that believe Senegal is losing its way as it becomes more modern, more accessible, and more Western. For now the more radical elements that Dansokho refers to as "Dark Forces" are small and not very influential. Yet, Senegal's economic problems could easily pave the way for these groups to gain influence in the political and legal arenas.

¶12. (U) Visit Embassy Dakar's SIPRNET website at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/af/dakar>.

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